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January 18, 2015

Dear Chairperson,

I am writing to let you know Far West Water and Sewer is still up to its old tricks. The commission staff recommended to the commission to allow the utility a huge rate increase. This rate increase was supposed to allow the utility to upgrade their equipment.

At the time of the hearing, customers of this utility testified that the owners of Far West were poor fiscal managers. Apparently the staff, who recommended the rate increase, is not directly affected by the actions of Far West. In fact, members of the staff are not living in Yuma. The staff acted strictly on the recommendation of the company attorney, and did not consider the testimony by customers of Far West.

Enclosed is an article which appeared in the Yuma Sun on Tuesday, January 15, 2015. The article points out that Far West has had another raw sewage leak. Please note the cause of the leak was, as noted by their attorney, and husband of one of the owners, is attributed to an equipment failure. I would think that, had they upgraded their equipment as stated in the justification for the rate increase, this leakage would not have occurred.

I think it points to the need for the commission to conduct a full, unannounced visit and investigation of Far West. The visit should be conducted to ensure Far West is, in fact, abiding by the direction of the Commission, and using the rate increase to improve service and equipment, and not for their personal gain.

I would appreciate a response to this correspondence.

Sincerely,

Harold Schweitzer
10729 E. 39th Lane,
Yuma, Arizona 85365

Enclosure: Yuma Sun article of January 15th

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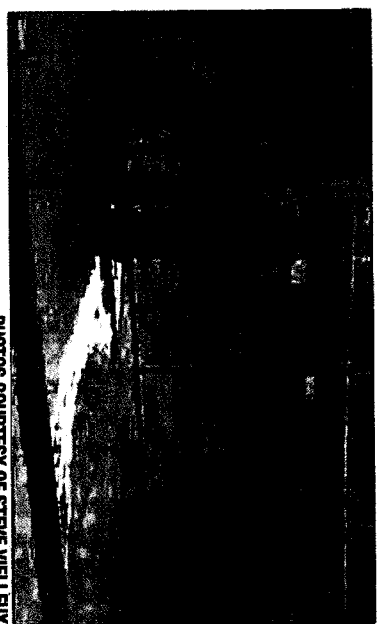
Raw sewage leak reported in Foothills

Far West says 'equipment failure' caused mishap

BLAKE HERZOG
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A raw sewage leak was reported Saturday morning from a Far West Sewer and Water pumping station in the Foothills east of Yuma, in the area around Foothills Boulevard and 44th Street.

Andy Capestro, attorney for Far West, said Wednesday the spill happened when an electrical short in the pumping unit at 44th Street and Hunter Avenue took out



PHOTOS COURTESY OF STEVE VIELLEUX

RAW SEWAGE LEAKS SATURDAY from a Far West Sewer and Water pumping station at 44th Street and Hunter Avenue in the Foothills.

both the main pump and the backup, as well as a radio that was supposed to notify maintenance crews of any equipment failures at the site.

"It wasn't because any-thing was overburdened or anything, it was just an equipment failure," Capestro said. The pumps there had been recently serviced, he said.

Crews quickly contained the spill, then decontaminated the area with chlorine tablets and a vacuum truck, he said, and "there was no residential damage."

He said crews had the station up and running again within two hours. "We took out the pump that had shorted out and put another one in, and then we had the electrician and our maintenance technician redo the circuit board," he said.

Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) spokesman Mark Shaffer said Wednesday that Far West told the agency about three Saturday sewage spills in the area on Tuesday, the notifications are required under state law.

Two, amounting to 2,500 gallons and 500 gallons, were at the pumping station. A third, of 500 gallons, was from a lift station at Hanks Market and Butcher Shop at Foothills Boulevard and 38th Street.

Steve Velleux lives three blocks away from the pump station and happened to drive by just after the leak was reported around 9:30 a.m. Saturday. "From the smell I could tell it was sewage," he said.

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age," he said. "I could see it running into the street, and when it got to the street you could see it was gurgling up from under a manhole."

He didn't call authorities because there was already a sheriff's deputy at the scene, but he did take photos while there and filed a formal complaint with ADEQ. "I haven't heard anything back, and I really don't think I will," he said.

Shaffer said the agency had received three complaints from the public about Far West sewer capacity overflow, and he believed they all stem from the Saturday morning incident. A water quality inspector arrived late Wednesday afternoon and verified the area had been disinfected.

"We are currently investigating the cause of the spills and determining the appropriate action," Shaffer said. He did not know whether the leak could pose any threat to public health in the area.

Vielleux said he is active with a group of Foothills residents who have begun an effort to form a special district for the purpose of buying Far West's assets and getting local control over what they say is a persistent septic odor problem. "I'm standing in my front yard right now, and I smell sewer," he said.

Far West is owned by Paula Capestro and Sandie Braden, the daughters of original Foothills developer Hank Schechert. It has 15,000 water accounts and 9,000 sewer customers, mostly in the Foothills but some inside Yuma city limits. The company got approval in 2013 for a 162 percent sewer rate increase from the Arizona Corporation Commission, over the protests of many customers. Representatives said at the time the hike was needed to avoid bankruptcy and improve the system.

Far West's network of sewer treatment plants and one water treatment plant was started by Schechert in the early 1990s, and its history includes a 2001 ac-

cident at an underground tank that killed two workers and a 2006 consent order that included a moratorium on hookups at its Del Oro plant. The moratorium was lifted within two years.

The company reached a \$500,000 settlement with ADEQ in 2010 for "numerous" water and air quality violations, settling a lawsuit the agency filed in 2008. Terms included a \$150,000 fine, improvements to remove sludge from water at the Del Oro plant and consolidation of operations to upgraded facilities by closing three older sites.

ADEQ inspectors issued a "potential violation" notice last March after responding to complaints about the Marwood sewer plant overflowing onto the adjacent par 3 golf course. An ADEQ report said that water was treated effluent, not raw sewage.

Odor issues were found at the time, and one of the three reactors appeared to be septic, reports said. Deficiencies noted at the time included inadequate signage for parts of the golf course watered with the effluent. All Far West facilities were inspected last November after multiple odor complaints were received, Shaffer said. Odor was improved significantly at the Marwood plant, but deficiencies were found at the Del Oro plant near the Mesa Del Sol Golf Club, where "odor-producing units were not in an enclosed area per the permit and the odor control unit was open to the air," Shaffer said.

Last month, Capestro showed ADEQ inspectors photos of additional scrubbers that had been added to the Del Oro plant, and he was told that if the equipment reduced the smell from the site, that plant would be in compliance, Shaffer said.

He said a new lift station at 40th Street and Foothills Boulevard will improve the system, and the Marwood plant is now operating smoothly. "It's in great shape, and the golf course on 56th (Street) is in gorgeous shape," he said.